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**THE SCULPTURES OF DE KOONING
WITH RELATED PAINTINGS,
DRAWINGS & LITHOGRAPHS**

Fruit Market Gallery, Edinburgh
15 October - 12 November 1977
Scottish Arts Council

Serpentine Gallery, London
26 November 1977-8 January 1978
Arts Council of Great Britain

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We are deeply grateful to the private collectors and the galleries whose loans have made the exhibition possible. We are especially indebted to the Stedelijk Museum for their help in organising the exhibition as well as for their major loans. Above all, we have to thank the artist's dealer, Xavier Fourcade, for his indispensable assistance and advice.

The exhibition is directed by David Sylvester.

Joanna Drew
Director of Exhibitions

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Foreword

A major retrospective exhibition of paintings and drawings by de Kooning was presented by the Arts Council at the Tate Gallery in the winter of 1968-69. No sculptures were included because at that time there were none.

In the wake of the fundamental contributions to the art of sculpture made by Daumier, Degas, Renoir, Matisse and Picasso, it has become rather the expected thing for painters involved in the human figure to do some work in sculpture. In de Kooning's case this work did not begin till he was 65, when, during a stay in Rome, he modelled thirteen small clay figures while daydreaming of a beach scene, with figures lolling, swimming, conversing. Later, back in America, he modelled a number of pieces on a larger scale. The resultant body of work seems interesting at first sight chiefly because it comes from the hand – very palpably comes from the hand – of de Kooning, one of the three or four best living painters. As familiarity with the sculpture increases, it becomes more and more intense and impressive in its own right.

The present exhibition comprises all the sculptures that have been cast in bronze together with a selection of paintings, drawings and lithographs made just before the sculptures, concurrently with them and since – a selection intended to pick out, as the title of the exhibition claims, works on the flat that are "related" to the sculptures. It is central to the purpose of the selection that it covers a wide variation in the degree of relatedness.

Two or three of those paintings which most clearly embody the vision of the figure realised in the sculptures were unfortunately not available for the exhibition. As to those works on the flat which seem furthest from the sculptures – those works which are most abstract or most reminiscent of landscape – there is still a significant vestige of the human figure in them which distinguishes them from, for example, that fine group of recent paintings shown last year in London at Gimpel Fils which seemed related to landscape to the exclusion of the figure.

David Sylvester

Biography

- 1904 Born 24 April in Rotterdam.
- 1916-1925 Apprenticed to a firm of commercial artists and decorators. Night classes at the Rotterdam Academy of Fine Arts and Techniques.
- 1926 Emigrated illegally to America and worked as a house-painter in Hoboken, New Jersey.
- 1927 Moved to New York City and began doing a variety of commercial art jobs.
- 1929 Met Stuart Davis and Arshile Gorky.
- 1934 Decided to become a full-time painter.
- 1935 Worked for the Federal Art Project.
- 1938 Met Elaine Fried. They were to marry in 1943, separating in the early 1950s.
- 1942 Exhibited at McMillan Inc., New York with John Graham, Stuart Davis, Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner.
- 1948 First one-man exhibition, at the Charles Egan Gallery, New York.
- 1950 Included in the Venice Biennale.
- 1953 The controversial exhibition of a series of *Women* at the Sidney Janis Gallery, New York.
- 1954 Exhibition at the Venice Biennale.
- 1956 Birth of his daughter, Lisa.
- 1958 Visited Venice.
- 1959-1960 Spent winter in Rome.
- 1963 Moved from New York City to The Springs, Long Island where he has since lived and worked in a house and studio of his own design.
- 1968 Returned to Holland, for the first time since emigrating, for the opening of the large retrospective exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum. This exhibition, directed by Thomas B. Hess, was then shown at the Tate Gallery and in 1969 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 1969 Travelled to Japan. Travelled to Spoleto, and while visiting Rome made his first sculptures.
- 1971 Started making life-size sculptures.



20 Seated Woman on a Bench 1972



Woman VI 1953 Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh



Queen of Hearts 1943-46 Hirshhorn Foundation, Washington



Azzic 1949
Muriel Newman Collection,
Chicago

De Kooning's Sculpture

by Andrew Forge

In de Kooning's figure paintings of the early 1940s – for example the Hirshhorn *Queen of Hearts* – the figures are seated in compact indoor spaces with chairs, tables and pictures on the wall. It is plain to see which is figure and which is room and if the boundaries between the two sometimes open up or overlap, this can be understood as a stage in the ebb and flow of an argument in which the general issues are on one hand the wholeness of the image of the figure, and on the other the wholeness of the picture. Soon this argument becomes focused on the matter of foreground and background, figure and field, and the great black abstracts and white abstracts such as *Attic* of the late 'forties are all about this. Human figures, if there are any, become fragmented and their pieces scattered around in spaces that have the quality of junk shops or crowded subway cars. When the terrible seated women return (1950–53) they are no longer made out as if at a distance and against a nameable background. And it isn't just that you can't tell whether they are indoors or out, but rather that the whole canvas seems equally active all over in its projection of the figure. It is almost as though the eyes, teeth, knees, feet etc. are as much attributes of the canvas as of the image inscribed within it. Once the background loses its specificity as background, the whole canvas reads as one. The hierarchy of foreground-background, positive-negative, important-unimportant, close-distant has been broken and consequently the whole frontality of the canvas (of which flatness is merely one feature among several) gives back its force and weight as image.

The intense reciprocity that we feel between ourselves and the face of his canvas – a phenomenon that we can encounter looking at a Fayum funerary portrait – it is not in itself unique – is given a unique impetus by de Kooning's violent and open manipulation of his paint. We are not only confronted by a frontal effigy but deeply embroiled in the painter's "battle" with that effigy. The magic properties of painting, not only to evoke and to look back, but to enlist us physiologically, to "come immediately onto the nervous system" in Francis Bacon's phrase, have rarely been mustered with such overwhelming force.

When the figure makes yet another come-back in the early 'sixties after a long 'abstract' episode, she is even more luxuriantly melded into the whole canvas. Line is no longer a forming element. Freely brushed areas of colour are cut into one another; the rosy flesh colour is pushed this way and that and the vigour of the emerging woman seems to billow to us out of the paint gesture, a gesture which never attaches itself to something represented out there but rather gropes and slides and crashes around until something comes to life here, no further away than the very surface of the canvas. The figure is born out of an internal transaction.

It is 'impure' painting at an extreme; its features were rediscovered in the sculpture.

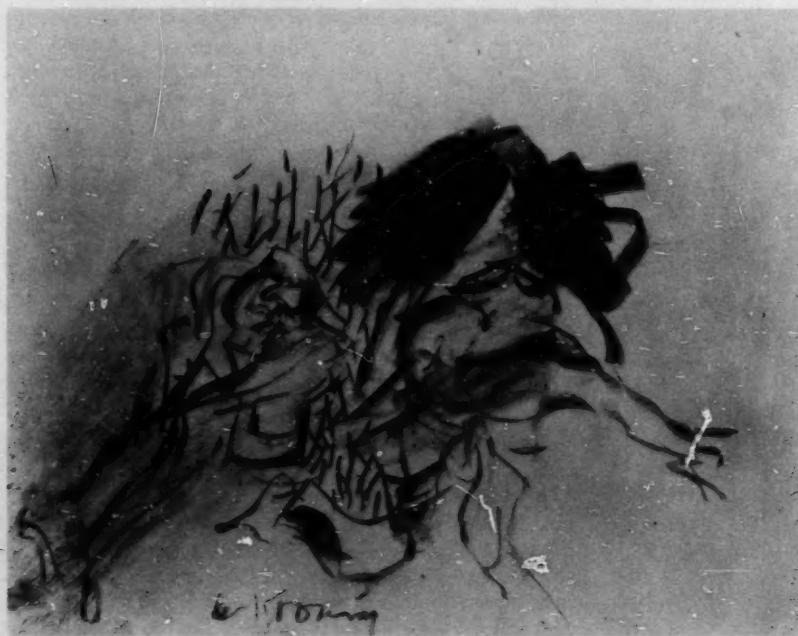
What happened was that in the summer of 1969, on holiday in Rome, de Kooning ran into an old friend, the American sculptor Herzl Emanuel. He had recently become the owner of a small bronze foundry outside Rome and he invited de Kooning to come and see the place. Once there, he offered him some clay to work with and the result was a number of hand-sized pieces, playfully made. Emanuel had one of these cast in bronze. De Kooning continued to visit the foundry for some weeks, making

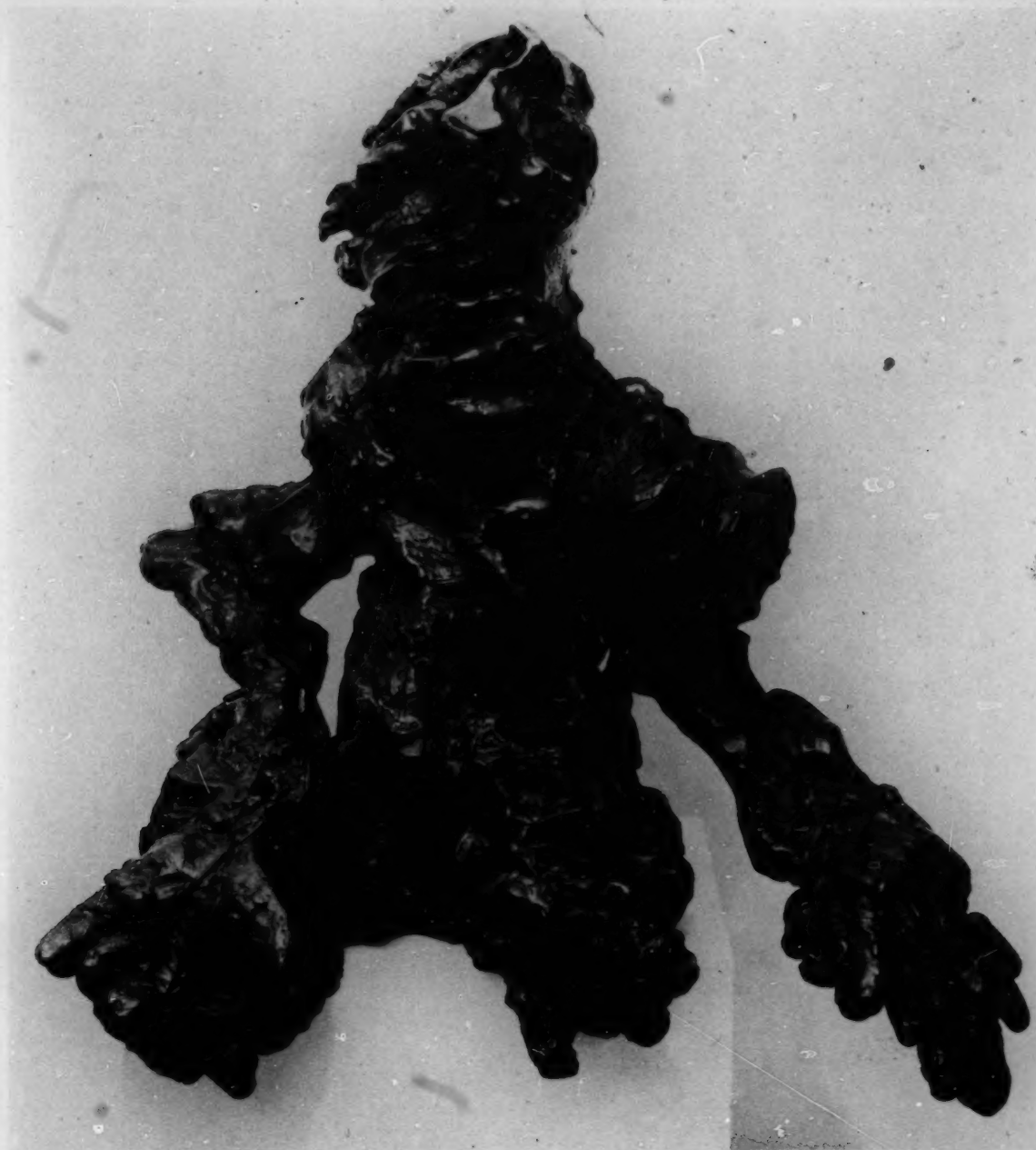
many pieces, some little more than gestures in clay, some fully realised figures. By the end of his visit thirteen had been selected for casting and the whole group in an edition of six was sent to New York after de Kooning had gone home. Nobody paid much attention to them. Xavier Fourcade, his dealer, was not particularly interested and de Kooning himself was not at that point intending to continue the experiment. Then the thirteen small sculptures were seen by Henry Moore. He was enthusiastic and insisted that there were qualities in them which would support enlargement. *Seated Woman* was chosen for the experiment and was handed over to a sculptural workshop. Its profiles were too complicated for accurate pointing and the work had to be done mostly by eye. The result is a *tour de force* by a young sculptor-craftsman called David Christian. When de Kooning saw the enlargement he was so impressed that he decided to work directly at the same scale and he engaged Christian to help him with the technicalities.

De Kooning has said of his sculpture that it is just like painting in three dimensions and he has added that the great advantage is that a sculpture doesn't die on him. A painting can be lost but if a sculpture goes wrong "I can take a piece of 2 x 4 and beat it down and it is still there ready to go." Much turns on the physical imprint, the contact, the internalisation of the raw clay. Handling it is like eating it in mouthfuls, not too much and not too little. He found his hands were literally too small for the larger pieces and he worked on them wearing gloves, two pairs of regular sized gloves and an outsized pair of workman's gloves on top.

These workman's gloves end up as flappy hands on more than one piece, reminders of the way in which twenty-five years ago he had used the cut-out mouths from cigarette advertisements to reinforce his own reading of the paintings.

The preceding works which open the way for the sculptures most clearly are the hundreds of soft drawings done in the last ten years, either with his left hand or with





25 Large Torso 1974

both hands or his eyes closed or watching television, all stratagems for breaking habits of hand and eye, or for finding a way of interiorising the act of drawing most completely, closing the gap between drawing and drawer. Does he sometimes sculpt with his eyes closed? He easily could. The anatomy of these pieces seems to follow the wayward proportioning that we associate with the gestures of the blind, which have their own hierarchies. In *Head 3* the ear and the eye become vast features, slowly felt over, balanced in a void, and the head itself is hardly more than a hollowed bone to support them.

It has become obvious over the years that the human figure is the real centre of his art. The various times when he has departed from it have been episodes which, once they have been worked through have allowed him to make closer and richer engagements with the figure. The sculpture helps us to see this. Its dark bronze gives a sombre inflexion to the very women we know in the paintings, hilarious in pink, and calms their panic mood. Freestandingness helps to unravel the imagery, allowing us in particular to come to grips with the later paintings which some critics have so glibly and wrongly dismissed.

With each new appearance of the figure in his work a haptic mode of perception is more and more in evidence, that is, a mode in which touch, body-feeling, muscular sensation take precedence over vision. Differentiations of contour and texture, and potentials for action, dominate. Space takes on the scale of the body itself. "If I stretch my arms next to the rest of myself and wonder where my fingers are – that is all the space I need as a painter," he said over a quarter of a century ago. There can hardly ever have been sculptures made in which the engagement with the material is more rawly exposed. And one cannot escape the feeling that somehow the work starts with this engagement, starts with it and ends with it too. In other words, the gestures, the rolling, pinching, gouging, flinging actions that one is continually reading as one moves around each piece are not agitations of the surface of the piece but rather the crests of violent actions that go to its very centre. And even the idea of 'centre' needs qualifying. It does not look to me as if the figures grow out from their armatures in obedience to an *a priori* idea (*Clam Digger* excepted), but rather as though they find themselves more or less precariously on an armature which is no more than a given support of such and such a dimension. And that the figures come and go, more or less violently, more or less ecstatically, in the 'blind' working of the material.

I have stressed the obvious, for the simple reason that I can put it into words. What results from this spontaneous haptic engagement with clay – the extraordinary energies damned and discharged, the multiple references, the paradoxes of feeling – hardness-in-softness, form-in-flux, whole-in-fragment, symmetry-in-distortion, eros-in-thanatos, terror-in-laughter – and the precise, diamond-point, unrepeatable sense of life, these can only be discovered by the individual viewer.



26 The Visit 1967



61 Wah Kee Spare Ribs 1970



22 Head 3 1973



49 Walking Figure 1968

Interview with Willem de Kooning

by Harold Rosenberg

De K: I am an eclectic painter by chance; I can open almost any book of reproductions and find a painting I could be influenced by. It is so satisfying to do something that has been done for 30,000 years the world over. When I look at a picture, I couldn't care less for when it was done, if I am influenced by a painter from another time, that's like the smile of the Cheshire Cat in *Alice*; the smile left over when the cat is gone. In other words I could be influenced by Rubens, but I would certainly not paint like Rubens.

I was lucky when I came to this country to meet the three smartest guys on the scene: Gorky, Stuart Davis and John Graham. They knew I had my own eyes, but I wasn't always looking in the right direction. I was certainly in need of a helping hand at times. Now I feel like Manet who said, "Yes, I am influenced by everybody. But every time I put my hands in my pockets, I find someone else's fingers there."

R: You once said that you could not draw like Rubens because you were too impatient. You said that you could draw a foot as accurately as Rubens, but that you didn't have the patience. Do you remember that? that -

De K: I don't remember, but I could very well have said it. I also think that maybe I don't really have the talent for that kind of drawing. I think that certain talents come into being at certain times, but that doesn't make them dead or alive.

R: I suppose nobody in our period could paint a detailed tableau of figures in the manner of the Renaissance?

De K: I think there might be people who could do that. For example, the Spanish painter Sert, who made the murals at the Waldorf Astoria. He was no Rubens, but he was a remarkable painter. He just didn't have as great a talent as Rubens.

R: You think there could be someone like Rubens today?

De K: I would say there is no reason why there couldn't be. George Spaventa and I were open-minded, and we thought there was no reason why, after 40 years of power, maybe one or two Russian artists would be gifted in the kind of painting that the Russian government demanded. We went to the Russian exhibition at the New York Coliseum with open minds. It turned out to be terrible painting - awful; the kind of painting done in this country in 1910 for the *Saturday Evening Post*.

R: Illustration?

De K: Not that so much, because you could say that Rubens is an illustrator too. I felt that making portraits of Lenin and Stalin and workingmen and genre - there was no reason why someone couldn't be very good at it. But they were not good at all. I had thought that maybe after being under pressure, which you slowly get used to, they might have found a way. But it seems that the Russian pressure wasn't the right kind.

R: But that's the idea that there are limits on what people can do in certain cultural situations.

De K: Yes, I guess; to come back to Rubens and to Sert, there must be something in the idea that a certain kind of art can only exist at a certain time.

R: That would be the point, wouldn't it? - A kind of historical pressure works against some forms of creation, though not necessarily in favor of something else?

De K: I take that for granted. But that's why I said before that I am an eclectic painter, and that I could be influenced by Rubens, but I would not paint like Rubens. The smile without the cat. For example, I object strongly to Renaissance drapery. There is so much cloth involved in that period - it looks like an upholstery store. To paint like that would drive me crazy. The drapery covered so many sins. Whenever the painter came to a difficult part he put another piece of cloth over it. That was the style, and it came to a high point ...

R: You once said you were opposed to any kind of esthetic an artist might have before he produced his work. I believe you were talking about Mondrian and the fact that the Neo-Plasticists tried to work out an esthetic in advance. You said that, at the turn of the century, "a few people thought they could take the bull by the horns and invent an esthetic beforehand." You had the feeling that such a program is a form of tyranny. It interferes with the freedom of the artist.

De K: Well we can go back to Russia. That's probably why good art did not come about there. You can't build an esthetic beforehand. They have canons of art, an Academy.

R: The Russians believe in an Academy, and they believe that art is a definite kind of work for which there are canons. The most admired artists in Russia are called Academicians. But

what you were talking about was a modern Academy...

De K: I remember that when I was a boy, on a cigar box they had "The Modern Age," the age of freedom and enlightenment, together with the great modern inventions. There was a blacksmith, barechested, with a leather apron, and a sledge-hammer over his back, which was considered a modern tool. And the wheel of progress was the biggest gear you ever laid eyes on – it certainly wasn't something that was made by a computer. Those symbols were a Romantic way of expressing the feeling of freedom.

R: Impressionism is very much involved with that – horse racing, ballet, all those things.

De K: I think Cubism went backwards from Cézanne because Cézanne's paintings were what you might call a microcosm of the whole thing, instead of laying it out beforehand. You are not supposed to see it, you are supposed to feel it. I have always felt that those beautiful Cubist paintings exist in spite of the Isms.

R: If you start with an idea...

De K: But they didn't. They were influenced by Cézanne and they could never have the patience to do all that again, once they knew what he was doing. But he didn't know.

R: They were influenced not so much by the pictures as by their analysis of the pictures. If you were influenced by Cézanne's pictures you would start imitating his look or style. But the Cubists didn't do that. They analyzed the pictures, and made rules out of what they found in their own minds.

De K: They made a superstructure, and for young people – I'm not being derogatory – for young people that was marvelous. It is unbelievable to think that men in 1910 or '11 could do such fantastic things, yet I don't think theirs was a particularly great "idea". It resulted in marvelous pictures because it was in the hands of fine artists. It depends on who was doing it. As a matter of fact, Cubism has a very Romantic look, much more than Cézanne has. Cézanne said that every brushstroke has its own perspective. He didn't mean it in the sense of Renaissance perspective, but that every brushstroke has its own point of view.

R: What's amazing is the problems artists in the early 20th century were able to conceive. Instead of painting so that the result would look impressive, they brought to light all sorts of problems. That's what has led to the idea of the desperation of painting. Because if painting isn't desperate – if it isn't in a crisis – why should it have so many problems? Simple responses don't count anymore, or being talented. Modern artists have genius for perceiving problems.

De K: It is interesting that the late Baroque artists were so empty. There is Bernini's Minimalness. He was a virtuoso of genius – terrific. You look at it and it doesn't say a thing. It says nothing about the enormous amount of work. If I ever saw Minimalism, there it was. It says nothing. Like a saint's gesture, looking upwards to heaven... It takes your breath away to see that done with such grandeur – and not say anything.

I don't want to defend myself, but I am said to be Cubist-influenced. I am really much more influenced by Cézanne than by the Cubists because they were stuck with the armature. I never made a Cubistic painting.

R: Suppose you have the idea that you'd like to paint a tableau of a tree with people or cats sitting under it. Isn't it true that, while you are painting, you must see yourself come into it? The action of painting has to catch the totality of object and subject. You cannot think it out beforehand. Isn't that why you mentioned Wittgenstein's saying, "Don't think, look!"? Then you go farther, "Don't look, paint!"

De K: That's right! There is this strange desire which you can't explain. Why should you do that? I think I like it because of the ordinariness, so I am free of an attitude, in a way. Of course, that in itself is an attitude, but it would help me in my work, I think... The landscapes I made in the 1950s, such as *Parc Rosenberg*, were the result of associations. But I had a vast area of nature – a highway and the metamorphosis of passing things. A highway, when you sit in a car – removed... Now I'm having the same difficulty. You might say that I'm going backwards by wanting to paint a tableau and not just the mood of it, a kind of double take. In contrast, one might paint something holy, like Barney Newman with his measurements and those divisions of colours (though the word "division" is a bad word). It was fascinating when Annalee [Newman] showed me his studio.

R: You are talking about the linoleum on his painting wall, those squares?

De K: Yes, I had thought that the linoleum would be squared off in feet – 1 foot, 2 feet, and so on. So that you could say, this canvas is 8 feet, 6 inches. But I found the squares to be 9 inches, and it's hard to measure by 9 inches. Ten is 1 with a zero. Nine is a mysterious number, because we stop there, and then we repeat the digits. In Europe there is the decimal system, but here the measure is twelve inches, with an eighth of an inch and a sixteenth of an inch...

R: Well, one could do a simple calculation. Ten of those squares would be 90 inches.

De K: Sure. But 9 is also a holy number. There is the mystery about why it is 9 – and then 1-zero, and start over again. This is contrary to our usual measurement system.



31 Flowers, Mary's Table 1971

R: Based on tens.

De K: Everything is based on tens, but then it isn't based on tens but on the human foot. That's 12 inches, and then the inch is divided into the half-inch, and then the quarter inch, the eighth inch. It is a peculiar thing. There is the great invention of the Egyptians of a rope with twelve knots, which makes a right angle - $3+4+5$. Barney was interested in the Cabala, I was told.

R: Tom Hess found evidence of that.

De K: Before I knew that I wondered why he bought linoleum with 9-inch squares.

R: You think it was on account of the sacredness of the number 9? Maybe he couldn't find linoleum with 12 inch . . .

De K: Oh, come on. There are so many linoleums with a foot-square design. Or he could have painted one. I wouldn't even paint the squares; I would just make marks on my wall.

R: Why then did he want that linoleum?

De K: Because he wanted it in 9 inches, as a thing to measure with. So I wondered what he wanted the number 9 for. Then, later, they found his interest in the Cabala. That was why, I felt, he wanted 9 inches. He could have had any measurement he wanted. He could have said, "why not?"

R: You mean 9 didn't mean anything to him in particular?

De K: Not particularly. He just liked it I guess. Actually paintings in the dimensions of 9 are hard to place in an ordinary room, because most rooms are only 8 feet 6 inches high. As for me, I like squarish forms. So I make paintings 7 to 8; 70 by 80 inches. If I want it bigger, I make it 77 by 88 inches. That is kind of squarish. I like it, but I have no mystique about it. Also, I like a big painting to look small. I like to make it seem intimate through appearing smaller than it is.

R: Usually, the opposite is the case. Artists want small paintings to look big.

De K: I can see that, if you really make a small painting. But if I make a big painting I want it to be intimate. I want to separate it from the mural. I want it to stay an easel painting. It has to be a painting, not something made for a special place. The squarish aspect gives me the feeling of an ordinary size. I like a big painting to get so involved that it becomes intimate; that it really starts to lose its measurements; so that it looks smaller. To make a small painting look big is very difficult, but to make a big painting look small is also very difficult.

I'm crazy about Mondrian. I'm always spellbound by him.

Something happens in the painting that I cannot take my eyes off. It shakes itself there. It has terrific tension. It's hermetic. The optical illusion in Mondrian is that where the lines cross they make a little light. Mondrian didn't like that, but he couldn't prevent it. The eye couldn't take it, and when the black lines cross they flicker. What I'm trying to bring out is that from the point of view of eyes it's really not optical illusion. That's the way you see it.

In a book on optical illusion there was an illustration with many lines drawn in a certain way. There were two parallel lines, then little lines like this and little lines like that from the other side. The figure looked narrower in the center than on the top and bottom. I don't call that an optical illusion. That's the way you see it. It looks narrower in the center.

R: You see it that way, but if you measured it, it would be different. That's the illusion.

De K: But in painting, that's the most marvelous thing you can do. That's the very strength of painting, that you can do that. It is "optic" naturally, because you have to have eyes to see it.) All painting is optic. If you close your eyes you don't see it. But if you open your eyes with your brain, and you know a lot about painting, then the optical illusion isn't an optical illusion. That's the way you see it.

R: The way you see something doesn't mean necessarily that that's the way it is. [...] Putting a stick in water so that it looks as if it's broken . . .

De K: Well it is. That's the way you see it.

R: What do you mean, it is broken? If you pull it out of the water it's not broken.

De K: I know. But it's broken while it's in the water.

R: The break is an illusion . . .

De K: That's what I am saying. All painting is an illusion. Mondrian gives you one kind of illusion, whatever you call it, tension . . . He calls it "dynamic equilibrium," or "clear plasticity." I don't care what he calls it. That's the way you see it. You have the illusion of this horse. I feel it, but that's the way I see it.

R: In that case he is an illusory painter in regard to you.

De K: To me, a cow by Courbet is no more illusory than Mondrian is. I know how it's painted . . .

R: You can do what you wish with a picture. Once after a meeting with art teachers at the University of Kentucky we were standing before a large painting of a side view of a cow in front of a house. One woman said: "Tell me what you see



54 Woman at Clearwater Beach 1971



32 Amityville 1971

in this picture." For the fun of it, I began to find all kinds of images painted into the cow, between its head and its tail. It turned into a Surrealist painting. The more we looked at it the more figures began to appear. It became a game – everyone found something – here is a clump of trees on the side of the cow, there is a river running down the cow's neck. All this began to appear, as if the artist had actually painted it.

De K: You mean he didn't paint it there?

R: No, they were accidental effects that appeared when you looked at it in a certain way – as if you were watching clouds. A human profile emerges, a cathedral, an animal. We were standing in this idle way and began to see babies and motorcycles on the side of the cow and around the cow. The art teachers behaved as if I had given them a kind of magical lecture, because at first they had seen only a cow and a house.

De K: I know now what you mean. I use that a lot in my work.

R: You mean accidental effects?

De K: I don't make an image such as a baby, but I use it . . .

R: That Abstract-Expressionist painting by Perle Finé that's hanging in our bedroom is so loaded with images – Arabs, masked bandits – I can hardly look at it any more. I don't see the painting, but the cast of characters that has come out of it.

De K: You know, those figures are very well drawn. If you asked her to draw a head she couldn't do it that way. That's the strange thing.

R: You are absolutely right. No artist could do it.

De K: That's the secret of drawing, because the drawing of a face is not a face. It's the drawing of a face. When you look at a Rembrandt, it's just an association that there is a man standing there that makes it realistic. Next to him there is a black shape. You know it is a man also. But if you look at that spot for a long time, there is no reason to think that it is a man. It happens with so many drawings and paintings – in Chinese art, in all kinds of art – and all the works come together.

R: What do you mean by coming together?

De K: That they become separated from their period. Chinese artists did something a thousand years ago, and somebody else today does something very similar.

R: They are not divided by history.

De K: No division by history at all.

R: What has been going on in the past couple of years?

Copying photographs or using actual photographs. Apparently young artists want to create the feeling of a *mise-en-scène*, a sort of tableau of people looking at pictures in an art gallery, or standing around at a party. What do these activities mean to you? Why should artists make art of photographs, instead of taking photographs for practical purposes, or for the sake of sentiment?

De K: Well, such art has a certain psychological effect. It's almost Minimal Art, as if one said, "Never mind what the meaning is, here it is." This art has a kind of atmosphere, a psychological overtone that is make-believe. You know it is painted and yet it looks like a photograph. I don't understand the meaning. The people look ordinary, and the cars are brand new and look sleeker than the people do, unless they have a beautiful model in front of them, and then the model looks sleeker than the car.

R: What's the reason for it? You would expect that works of this sort would advertise something, or on the other hand have a political message to tell.

De K: On television you often see shots, as in scenes televised from Vietnam, that look exactly like painting. If you have that kind of eye, you may say: "That looks like a Manet." Of course it's a coincidence. Sometimes a painted portrait looks like a photograph, and sometimes a photograph looks like a portrait. There is something fascinating for me about photography.

R: You don't feel that painting has a particular purpose, or one that you would like to see it have? You don't care why people paint whatever they paint?

De K: The main thing is that art is a way of living – it's the way I live. It's not programmatic. When I read *The Brothers Karamazov*, I liked the father the most.

R: I happen to agree that Fyodor Karamazov is the most important character.

De K: In the end he is really all there, and the others couldn't break out of a paper bag by themselves. The father isn't a nice man, but I was painting a picture and all of a sudden it came to me that I liked the father the most . . . It came like a revelation. It hung in the air somehow. A novel is different from a painting. I have said that I am more like a novelist in painting than like a poet. But this is a vague comparison because there is no plot in painting. It's an occurrence which I discover by, and it has no message.

R: You mean your painting is an event?

De K: It is an event, and I won't say it is kind of empty, but . . .

R: An event without an interpretation.

De K: Yes. I have no message. My paintings come more from other paintings. Here is ARTnews, and I become fascinated. I could paint the head of this horse. But that would be an abstract painting. There seems to be something constant for me in painting. This man, you could say, is like a Matisse. But this one is made by a Greek, 3,000 years ago, and it looks like a Japanese drawing. I don't know how old these things are – I see them with my eyes. The caption says: "The golden age of Greek painting comes to life in this bucolic scene of a herdsman leading his horses" done between 340 and 320 B.C. That's a long time ago. It's fascinating, isn't it, that this was painted 2,300 years ago and you know right away that this is a tree. I am interested in that. It seems it could only happen in the Impressionist period. But once you have Impressionist eyes, you look at those small Pompeian paintings – not the big classical ones – the little paintings with a tree and a rock, and they are almost the same as Impressionism. This is my pleasure of living – of discovering what I enjoy in paintings.

R: Discovering what other people have done, that is like what you have been doing?

De K: Yes, in discovering what other people have done, and that I can do it too. It is like an overtone of my *Woman* paintings, which are supposed to make me a matricide or a woman hater or a masochist and all sorts of other things. Maybe I am a bit like any other man, but I wouldn't show it off in my paintings...

De K: Why do I live in Springs? To begin with, my friends were already there. But also I was always fascinated with the underbrush... the entanglement of it. Kind of biblical. The clearing out... to make a place. Lee Eastman found a large house for me on Lily Pond Lane, [The Springs is the part of Easthampton where fishermen and workmen live. Lily Pond Lane is the estate district. – Ed.] but I knew it wasn't for me. There was no underbrush – it had been taken away generations ago. I like Springs because I like people who work. Snob Hill is really nice, too, but the trees have already grown up there and it looks like a park – it makes me think of people in costume and Watteau. As I said, I had friends in Springs and visited them and that made me decide to move in.

R: Has working in the country affected your work? Everybody seems to think that it has.

De K: Enormously! I had started working here earlier, and I wanted to get back to a feeling of light in painting. Of course you don't have to have it, but every artist has it. Léger has a light. It's another kind of light, I guess; it's hard to go into that. I wanted to get in touch with nature. Not painting scenes from nature, but to get a feeling of that light that was

very appealing to me, here particularly. I was always very much interested in water.

R: You were interested in light on Tenth Street, too, where the light is, of course, quite different.

De K: On Fourth Avenue I was painting in black and white a lot. Not with a chip on my shoulder about it, but I needed a lot of paint and I wanted to get free of materials. I could get a gallon of black paint and a gallon of white paint – and I could go to town... Then I painted the *Women*. It was kind of fascinating. *Woman I*, for instance, reminded me very much of my childhood, being in Holland near all that water. Nobody saw that particularly, except Joop Sanders. He started singing a little Dutch song. I said, "Why do you sing that song?" Then he said, "Well, it looks like she is sitting there." The song had to do with a brook. It was a gag and he was laughing, but he could see it. Then I said, "That's very funny, because that's kind of what I am doing." He said, "That's what I thought."

R: You mean you had the water feeling even in New York?

De K: Yes, because I was painting those women, and it came maybe by association, and I said, "It's just like she is sitting on one of those canals there in the countryside." In Rotterdam you could walk for about 20 minutes and be in the open country. Of course in that time it still looked like the Barbizon School, the idea of farms and...

R: But then you did *Gotham News* and those rough looking cityscapes.

De K: I started doing them later. Then slowly I got more and more involved with being here in Easthampton, and it came to me that one has different periods in painting. There was a certain time when I painted that men series...

R: In the 1930s?

De K: Yes, but it was all in tone. The *Glazier* was influenced by Pompeian murals. I was often with Gorky when I saw those murals, and he couldn't get over the idea of painting on a terra-cotta wall like the Pompeians were doing. I had that yellow ochre, and I painted a guy on the yellow ochre and the wall was really like the yellow ochre, a flat thing. It was never completely successful, but still it had that feeling. Then slowly I changed, and when I started to make those landscapes, I had the idea of a certain kind of light from nature. The paintings I was doing of men had another idea of light, not like on a wall...

I knew that if I made some kind of shapes with certain tones or values of paints mixed in paint-cans, instead of having ready-made colors from art-store tubes, that I would be stuck. But if I began arbitrarily, then I would have to find a



36 Untitled II 1976

way to come back with an answer. I don't know if you get what I mean.

R: Well, say some more about it.

De K: Arbitrarily, I made those bright flesh colors. All I needed was white and orange to give me an ideal, bizarre flat color, like the color on Bavarian dolls. I made it completely arbitrarily. Then for some reason or other – I forget the details – the idea was that I was going to make a liver color, and the liver color I picked out was the color of the liver when it was cooked and sliced as I remember it from Holland. That was a kind of grey-brownish color and to get it I had to mix about six different colors. It was an uncomfortable color to work with, and I wanted to be kind of stuck with it. It did me a lot of good because it was like a tone; something you can't lay your hands on; almost like a kind of light on a roof. It seems colorless, like a dazed kind of light. It can be a dark color or a light color. You can make it shade in between things. If you have a light of so-called bright colors, you can make them tones in between. It shapes up to the doings of it.

R: Was this color one you used in the landscapes?

De K: That's right. I even carried it to the extent that when I came here I made the color of sand – a big pot of paint that was the color of sand. As if I picked up sand and mixed it. And the grey-green grass, the beach grass, and the ocean was all kind of steely grey most of the time. When the light hits the ocean there is kind of a grey light on the water.

R: And that was related to the liver?

De K: Well, it came out. I kept forgetting about it, but I was in a state where I could start with that. I had three pots of different lights, instead of working with red, white and blue like Léger or Mondrian ...

R: Instead of the colors you had tones!

De K: Indescribable tones, almost. I started working with them and insisted that they would give me the kind of light I wanted. One was lighting up the grass. That became that kind of green. One was lighting up the water. That became that grey. Then I got a few more colors, because someone might be there, or a rowboat, or something happening, I did very well with that. I got into painting in the atmosphere I wanted to be in. It was like the reflection of light. I reflected upon the reflections on the water, like the fishermen do. They stand there fishing. They seldom catch any fish, but they like to be by themselves for an hour. And I do that almost every day.

R: You do that?

De K: I've done it for years. As in your lecture about the "water gazers," do you remember, in the beginning of *Moby Dick*? When Ishmael felt desperate and didn't know what to do he went to Battery Place. That's what I do. There is something about being in touch with the sea that makes me feel good. That's where most of my paintings come from, even when I made them in New York.

R: How does the figure come in? How do you relate it to the light of the landscapes?

De K: I started all over again in the sense of painting those women I painted on Fourth Avenue and on Tenth Street [in 1950–55]. I went back to it here. When I made *Woman Sag Harbor* [1964] I just titled it that, because I go to Sag Harbor and I like the town and I frequently have this association. While I was painting it I said to myself, "That's really like a woman of Sag Harbor, or Montauk, where it's very open and barren." I started to make them more in tone. You can see that; in brightness of light, which makes me think I have some place for her.

R: In those tones?

De K: Yes, in those tones. There is a place there. When I say Montauk ... Oh, I could find other places. There is no difference between the ocean beach nearby and at Montauk, but I have an association because I go there quite often. Particularly in the off-season, in the late fall, or even in the wintertime. It would be very hard for me now to paint any other place but here.

R: The light, of course, is quite different in the wintertime, isn't it?

De K: It gets very pure. Blue skies and very pure light. The haze is gone. Some of my paintings have that light and develop that haze.

De K: If you have nothing to do and want to meditate and have no inspiration, it might be a good idea to make a sphere.

R: Out of what?

De K: Out of plaster. It's easy. You can add to it, you can sandpaper it. But you mustn't use calipers or any other instrument. You could never make that sphere because you would never know.

R: You mean, you wouldn't know when you had produced a perfect sphere? Or you wouldn't know how to go about making it?

De K: You can imagine yourself doing it. Let's say you make it about 12 inches, but you don't use a ruler. It is very hard to know what 12 inches is without a ruler.



46 Untitled (Figures in Landscape) 1967



R: Do you want it to be a sphere of a certain size or just round?

De K: Well, you could start to make it 12 inches. Then you turn it around and say, "Gee, I have to sandpaper this a little more." Then the next time you say, "I have to add a little more here." You keep turning it around and it will go on forever because you can only test it by eye.

R: If you didn't feel that you had to add or subtract, would you be convinced you had a perfect sphere? I mean, if you got to the point where you felt there was nothing you could do to it. Then it would be a sphere, wouldn't it?

De K: Yes, but that can never happen.

R: You don't think one would ever get that feeling?

De K: No, because a sphere is social. If they give you a ball bearing, you know it is absolutely right?

R: You would take their word for it.

De K: Most things in the world are absolutes in terms of taking someone's word for it. For example, rulers. But if you yourself made a sphere, you could never know if it was one. That fascinates me. Nobody ever will know it. It cannot be proven, so long as you avoid instruments. If I made a sphere and asked you, "Is it a perfect sphere?" you would answer, "How should I know?" I could insist that it looks like a perfect sphere. But if you looked at it, after a while you would say, "I think it's a bit flat over here." That's what fascinates me — to make something I can never be sure of, and no one else can either. I will never know, and no one else will ever know.

R: You believe that's the way art is?

De K: That's the way art is.

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15 Clam Digger 1972

Sculptures

Height measurement is given; all the works are in bronze

*Illustrated in catalogue

1
Untitled 1 1969
18.5cm

2
Untitled 2 1969
16.5cm

3
Untitled 3 1969
20cm

4
Untitled 4 1969
16.5cm

5
Untitled 5 1969
35.5cm

6
Untitled 6 1969
20cm

7
Untitled 7 1969
18cm

8
Untitled 8 1969
20cm

9
Untitled 9 1969
28cm

10
Untitled 10 1969
21cm

11
Untitled 11 1969
18.5cm

12
Untitled 12 1969
17cm

13
Untitled 13 1969
39.5cm

14
Seated Woman 1970
66cm

15*
Clam Digger 1972
151cm

16
Cross-legged Figure 1972
61cm

17
Floating Figure 1972
62cm

18
Head 1 1972
24.5cm

19
Head 2 1972
35.5cm

20*
Seated Woman on a Bench 1972
96.5cm

21
Hostess 1973
129.5cm

22*
Head 3 1973
49.5cm

23
Head 4 1973
28cm

24
Small Seated Figure 1973
46cm

25*
Large Torso 1974
91.5cm

Paintings

*Illustrated in catalogue

26*

The Visit 1967

oil on canvas

152.5 × 122cm

Trustees of the Tate Gallery

27

Two Figures in a Landscape 1967

oil on canvas

178 × 203cm

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

28

Woman in Landscape III 1968

oil on canvas

142 × 122cm

Private collection

29

Woman in Landscape IV 1968

oil on canvas

152.5 × 122cm

Private collection, New York

30

Red Man with Moustache 1971

oil on paper mounted on canvas

185.5 × 91.5cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

31*

Flowers, Mary's Table 1971

oil on canvas

203 × 178cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

32*

Amityville 1971

oil on canvas

203 × 178cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

33

Untitled 1972

oil on paper mounted on canvas

78 × 74.5cm

Mr and Mrs Lee V. Eastman

34

Untitled 1974

oil on paper mounted on canvas

104.5 × 76.4cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

35

Untitled VI 1975

oil on canvas

203 × 178cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

36*

Untitled II 1976

oil on canvas

221.5 × 195cm

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

37*

Untitled XX 1976

oil on canvas

203 × 178cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

38

Untitled (Two Figures in a Landscape) 1976

oil on paper mounted on canvas

77 × 89cm

Private collection

Drawings

*Illustrated in catalogue

39

Untitled 1966

charcoal on paper

20.4 × 25.5cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

40

Untitled 1966

charcoal on paper

20.4 × 25.5cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

41

Untitled 1966

charcoal on paper

20.4 × 25.5cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

42

Untitled I 1966-67

charcoal on tracing paper

61 × 47.5cm

Trustees of the Tate Gallery

43

Untitled II 1966-67

charcoal on tracing paper

47.5 × 61cm

Trustees of the Tate Gallery

44*

Drawing 1967

charcoal on paper

47.5 × 61cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

45

Untitled 1967

charcoal on paper

47.5 × 61cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

46*

Untitled (Figures in Landscape) 1967

charcoal on paper

47.5 × 60.5cm

Susan Brockman

47

Drawing 1968

charcoal on paper

48.3 × 61cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

48*

Untitled 1968

charcoal on tracing paper

61 × 47.5cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

49*

Walking Figure c. 1968

charcoal on paper

61 × 48.3cm

J. Abeles

50

Untitled 1969

charcoal on paper

47.5 × 61cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

51

Untitled (Spoleto) 1970

ink on paper

66 × 47.5cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

52

Untitled (Spoleto) 1970

ink on paper

66 × 47.5cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

53

Untitled (Spoleto) 1970

ink on paper

66 × 47.5cm

Xavier Fourcade Inc., New York

Lithographs

*Illustrated in catalogue

- 54*
Woman at Clearwater Beach 1970
lithograph from aluminium plate drawn by the artist on transfer paper
71.7 × 102.9cm
- 55
The Marshes 1970
lithograph from aluminium plate collage drawn by the artist on transfer paper
102.9 × 72.4cm
- 56
Big 1970
lithograph from aluminium plate drawn by the artist on transfer paper
101.6 × 72.4cm
- 57
Clam Digger 1970
lithograph from aluminium plate drawn by the artist on transfer paper
101.6 × 72.4cm
- 58
Woman in Amagansett 1970
lithograph from aluminium plate drawn by the artist on transfer paper
71.8 × 101.6cm
- 59
Weekend at Mr and Mrs Krisher 1970
lithographs from aluminium plate drawn directly by the artist on copperplate de luxe paper with black ink
108 × 76.2cm
- 60
as 59, on akawara paper with transparent black ink
128.3 × 88.9cm
- 61*
Wah Kee Spare Ribs 1970
lithographs from aluminium plate drawn directly by the artist on suzuki paper with transparent black ink
144.4 × 94cm
- 62
as 61, on copperplate de luxe paper with transparent black ink
106.7 × 78.7cm
- 63
Sting Ray 1970
lithograph from aluminium plate collage drawn by the artist on transfer paper
129.5 × 92.1cm
- 64
Reflections: to Kermit for our Trip to Japan 1970
lithograph from aluminium plate collage drawn by the artist on transfer paper
128.3 × 88.9cm
- 65
Figure at Gerard Beach 1970
lithograph from aluminium plate drawn by the artist on transfer paper
101.6 × 71.8cm
- 66
Minnie Mouse 1971
lithograph from stone drawn by the artist on the stone
76.2 × 55.9cm
- 67
Landscape at Stanton Street 1971
lithograph from stone drawn by the artist on the stone
76.2 × 56.5cm
- 68*
The Preacher 1971
lithograph from stone drawn by the artist on the stone
76.2 × 56.2cm
- 69
With Love 1971
lithograph from stone drawn by the artist on the stone
39.4 × 32.4cm

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